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Currents in the News

Untying CIA—and Reviving Old Fears

A backstage struggle over proposals to "unleash" the Central Intelligence Agency hit a point in mid-March where the unit's No. 2 man hinted he might resign in protest.

The suggested changes would give the agency authority to spy on Americans at home and engage in clandestine operations abroad. Such powers would reverse a 6-year-old policy of strict restraints on CIA activities.

The restrictions were applied in the post-Watergate period of the 1970s after discovery that the CIA for years had carried out illegal surveillance of U.S. political groups, unlawfully opened mail of thousands of Americans, tested mind-altering chemicals on unsuspecting persons and contemplated assassinating foreign leaders.

What triggered the controversy was the leak of a draft of a proposed presidential directive that would lift the ban on CIA spying in the United States. A CIA spokesman insisted that the 16-page document was not final and was only one of several being considered.

Nevertheless, the leak brought into the open a behind-the-scene battle in the intelligence community over restrictions on CIA's espionage activities in this country. The depth of the internal conflict was dramatized when Adm. Bobby Inman, the CIA's new deputy director, said in an interview that he was fighting against a "series of repugnant changes" in rules governing the agency's operations.

Inman, former director of the National Security Agency, indicated that if he lost the battle he might resign.

Inman outlined his view at a closed meeting of the Senate Intelligence Committee. His stand, as reported by Senator Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.): "The CIA has no business involving itself in domestic operations, much less those directed against American citizens."

In defending the proposed rules, an administration official insisted the

aim was just to clarify the line between the CIA and the FBI. This is necessary, the official asserted, to keep terrorists under surveillance by the CIA abroad from slipping through the cracks if they enter the U.S.

The controversy was fueled by two developments pointing to a stronger CIA role in operations abroad.

One was a report that the Reagan administration wants Congress to repeal legislation that bars the CIA from helping rebels trying to overthrow Angola's Marxist regime.

The second was a statement by Reagan that there is "something to be considered" in proposals that the U.S. give arms to insurgents who are fighting Russians in Afghanistan. □

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CIA's Inman.

